McCormick Days Panel Discussion

JMB, David Neff, Gustav Niebuhr

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FOURTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

(a) How does church communicate in and with the public press and other media? Since language of faith is not broadly understood, how does church and leaders communicate effectively?

(a) Site Public Religion Project/Marty Center—re Study by Medill School of Journalism.

--high percentage of stories are about religion, primarily—or secondarily, tertiarily

Kosovo—Serb, Orthodox, Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian—Catholics.

Israel/Palestine

- Orthodox Judiasm
- Secular Jews
- Arab(Muslim) Israelis
- Christian Israelis
- Christian Palestinians

Northern Ireland

China—Religious freedom for Christians

- Chinese Church
- Chinese Roman Catholics

Chinese Protestants

Recent commitment to sensitive and priority coverage in local news

Chicago papers—bright, knowledgeable religious editors

New York Times—Gus, article on who killed Christ—showed high level of theological and biblical sophistication

Good insights.

Los Angeles Times—John Dart

The Challenge of Public Religion

If we don't want to be misinterpreted, misunderstood, we must get better at public information system.

Chicago joke is that Christians seem to mean Roman Catholic. In some important ways that's true. There are 3 million Roman Catholics in Chicago.

Diocese has press office and officer

Regular press releases

I asked former Tribune Editor and he said, "If you want coverage, give us material."

We're not equipped to be a Public Church in pluralistic culture.

No ecumenical organization in Chicago

And denominationally, we're so strapped for cash and personnel—a Press Office and PR function comes in dead last.

So, we need to learn how to do it—in a situation that is far more pluralistic than anyone ever imagined.

Gustav Niebuhr—"When the idealized vision of a Christian nation bumps up against the reality of religious pluralism."

Some things to do—

Get acquainted—it's not "currying favor"—just basic due diligence.

Invite religion editor to lunch—show him/her around (they'll appreciate it)

Establish system of press releases—

If you don't want him/her to misunderstand what happens at General Assembly, make sure he/she has right information.

2. What is role of religious journalism in contemporary American culture?

Our mission differs depending on who we think we are and who our readers are likely to be.

(b) Gus’s mission and David’s are different, obviously.

(c) David’s readers (and ours) are interested—pay money to read.

(d) Gus’s may be paying for Sports page, Maureen Dowd.

What we have in common—

(a) Commitment to truth telling

(b) Accuracy and a clear definition of what is news and what is opinion/editorial.

Not always clear—as we continue to learn

History written by_____

Japanese public school history curriculum that describes World War II very differently. When international community objected, Japanese historians responded that we all reserve the right to tell our own stories.

Religious journalism—even more difficult, because going in, we are deeply committed to our tradition, our story.

Presbyterian Church (USA) fuss with *Presbyterian Layman* is precisely here—line between fact and opinion very hazy and often violated.

The Dirk Ficca ‘What’s the Big Deal About Jesus?” fracas.

It was, in fact, a rhetorical question—

Discussion of pluralism

The question—

Dirk’s answer

It was not a dismissal and rejection of orthodox Christology, but that’s the way the Layman reported it and uses it to raise money—dishonest.

Truth telling is prophetic—that's what a prophet is.

Israel/Palestine—not easy.

Christian Century mission:

"In publishing the *Christian Century* magazine, the Christian Century Foundation aims to stimulate Christian witness in all areas of life by raising critical questions, enhancing discernment and advancing social action and personal faith. The Foundation encourages the best scholars, writers and artists to share their gifts with the church and the world in a journal that is intellectually provocative, accessible, open-minded and faithful to Christian tradition."

Our unique mission—

(a) To cultivate the ongoing theological conversation.

(b) To provide resources for our readers.

(c) To interpret the news—Justin Dart

(d) To resource pastor/preacher

(e) Living by the word

(f) Faith matters

(g) Designed to be “user friendly”

(h) Books

(a) Re: 1st Amendment (freedom of speech and __establishment)—what is press role in increase of religious diversity?

Two questions: Us and Press

Us

(a) information—get it right—cut through stereotypes, over-simplifications, half-truths, euphemisms.

We haven’t don’t it well. The explosion of Islamic fundamentalism caught us—Iranian revolution.

All of a sudden, a world in which Islam is major factor—beyond Lawrence of Arabia and El Cid

Islam is no more monolithic than Christianity—w/Vatican, Orthodoxy and Pentecostalism.

And we probably know a lot more about Islam than others.

(b) The most important challenge—how to tell our story honestly in a way that doesn't invalidate other stories

OR

How to affirm our deepest convictions about God, the world, human prospect, in a culture where others hold equally deep convictions.

How to express exclusive truth claims in a world where others have equally exclusive claims.

A theological conversation.